

Texas Historical Commission (JM), 5/20/76; staff revision  
(DP), 5/21/76  
27"x 42" Official Texas Historical Marker w/o post; installation  
is to be on concrete slab  
Jefferson County (Order #4680) Location: Pipkin Park, River-  
side Dr. at Emmett St.,  
Beaumont

JEAN BAPTISTE CHAISON\*  
(AUGUST 7, 1745-JULY 20, 1854)\*\*\*

JEAN BAPTISTE ("JONAS") CHAISON WAS BORN IN NOVA  
SCOTIA, OF FRENCH PARENTS. AFTER IMPRISONMENT BY THE  
BRITISH DURING THE FRENCH AND INDIAN WAR, HE AND HIS  
PARENTS FLED IN 1763 TO FRANCE, WHERE HE WAS SOON  
ORPHANED. HE RETURNED TO NORTH AMERICA, AND JOINED  
THE COLONIAL ARMY IN 1775 AT QUEBEC, TO TAKE REVENGE  
AGAINST THE BRITISH. CONTINUING IN THE CONTINENTAL  
ARMY, HE SERVED WITH LAFAYETTE AT BRANDYWINE, 1777;  
FOUGHT AT GERMANTOWN, 1777; WAS WOUNDED SERVING  
UNDER GREENE AND MARION AT EUTAW SPRINGS, 1781; AND  
FOUGHT UNDER LAFAYETTE'S COMMAND AT YORKTOWN, 1781.

COMING TO WESTERN LOUISIANA AS A CATTLE RAISER AND  
FARMER ABOUT 1785, HE MARRIED MARIE LeBLANC AND  
HAD EIGHT CHILDREN. ABOUT 1840 HE MOVED TO BEAUMONT  
TO LIVE WITH HIS SON McGUIRE CHAISON (1809-1859). HE  
WAS STRONG AND HEALTHY OF MIND AND BODY AS LONG AS  
HE LIVED, AND FARMED HERE UNTIL 1854. DYING AT A  
FEW DAYS UNDER 109 YEARS OF AGE, HE WAS BURIED IN  
JIROU CEMETERY (3 MI. N). HE WAS ONE OF THE FEW MEN  
OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION INVOLVED IN TEXAS HISTORY.  
THE DAUGHTERS OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION MARKED HIS  
GRAVE SITE IN 1944. THE DAR MARKER WAS MOVED HERE  
TO PIPKIN PARK WHEN A CHURCH WAS BUILT IN 1969 IN  
THE EXTINCT JIROU CEMETERY. \*\*

(1976)\*\*\*

\*3/4" lettering  
\*\*1/2" lettering  
\*\*\*1/4" lettering

FILE COPY - DO NOT REMOVE

APPROVED

Truett Latimer

by *Bob Water* 6-7-76

# APPLICATION FORM FOR OFFICIAL TEXAS HISTORICAL MARKER

(Revised 1974)

TEXAS HISTORICAL COMMISSION  
P. O. Box 12276, Austin, Texas 78711

# 4680

RECEIVED  
FEB 20 1976  
TEXAS HISTORICAL COMMISSION

County Jefferson Date February 12, 1976

1. Title of marker Jean Baptiste ("Jonas") Chaison  
1745-1854

2. Name of building, cemetery, public square, park, etc., where marker is to be placed. Pipkin Park

3. Marker site (street address or highway number) Riverside Drive (at Emmett Street)

4. City or nearest city. If marker is to be placed on a highway or in a small community, you must briefly explain how to get there from nearest town shown on a Texas Highway Department road map. For example, "Marker will be in Bastrop Beach, which is 6 miles southeast of Angleton on FM 523."  
Beaumont, Texas

5. Distance (miles, yards, feet) and direction (north, south, east, west) of subject from marker site. For example, "Subject is 1/2 mile southwest of marker site."  
Extinct Jirou Cemetery about three miles north of marker site.  
*MR. CHAISON IS BURIED IN*

6. Owner of marker site City of Beaumont, Beaumont, Texas  
Address c/o Mrs. P. G. Matthews City Beaumont, Texas 77705

7. Sponsor of marker Daughters of the American Revolution, Address Rt. 2, Box 238G, Beaumont, Texas 77705 City Beaumont, Texas 77705

8. Mrs. C. H. Benckenstein, Address 1005 23rd St. Beaumont, TX, 77706 City Beaumont, TX, 77706  
County chairman  
"I have reviewed the narrative for this marker and attest to its accuracy."

9. Person to whom marker is to shipped Mrs. Lamar C. Bevil Street Address 6030 Gladys City Beaumont, Texas 77706  
Note: If marker is to be placed on a highway right-of-way, it will automatically be shipped to your district highway engineer.

10. Surface to which marker will be attached (i.e., wood, brick, stucco over stone) if not on post.  
Concrete slab

## ORDER FORM

Please consult the marker catalog for specifications of the markers, paperweights, and signs available. Check the items desired below. Then mail this application and narrative history, together with a check made payable to the Texas Historical Foundation, to the address above. No applications will be accepted unless payment is included.

### HISTORICAL MARKERS

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> 27" x 42" subject marker with post ..... \$475               | <input type="checkbox"/> 16" x 12" building marker with post ..... \$150           |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 27" x 42" subject marker without post ..... \$435 | <input type="checkbox"/> 16" x 12" building marker without post ..... \$125        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 18" x 28" subject marker with post ..... \$250               | <input type="checkbox"/> 16" x 12" building plaque only ..... \$ 75                |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 18" x 28" subject marker without post ..... \$220            | <input type="checkbox"/> 14" medallion only (for replacement purposes) ..... \$ 50 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 16" x 12" grave marker (comes with mounting bar) ..... \$125 |  |

### MARKER REPLICA PAPERWEIGHT

This item should be ordered at the same time marker is ordered. Indicate quantity desired. Allow six months from completion of marker for receipt of paperweight.

- 3" x 4" plastic paperweight with replica of marker inside \$ 50

### SCOTCHLITE HIGHWAY DIRECTIONAL SIGNS

Please indicate quantity desired.

- 24" x 24" Historical Markers In City sign ..... \$ 50
- black-and-white (for farm-to-market roads, state and U.S. highways)
- green-and-white (for interstate highways)

18" x 22" Historical Route sign (in black-and-white only) ... \$ 50

- with arrow pointing straight ahead
- with arrow pointing left
- with arrow pointing right

JEAN BAPTISTE ("JONAS") CHAISON  
1745 - 1854

by Charlsie E. Berly

A French-American patriot of the Revolutionary War, Jean Baptiste Chaison (Chiasson, early spelling) is one of thirty-seven veterans whose graves have been located in Texas. "Jonas," as he was sometimes called, lived more than fifty years of his long life in the upper Gulf Coast region of Louisiana and Texas, and made the soil of Jefferson County his final resting-place.<sup>1</sup>

Born in Halifax, Nova Scotia, on August 7, 1745, Chaison had lived to the great age of 108 years, 11 months, 13 days, when he died on July 20, 1854, at the home of his son McGuire Chaison, in Beaumont (Jefferson County), Texas. He possessed health and strength of both mind and body up to the time of his death and apparently "went to sleep," tired with age. The place of birth and dates of his life-span are drawn from a memorial letter written from Georgetown, Texas, on December 1, 1855, one year after the death of Chaison in 1854, and addressed to the Editor of the Texas State Times for publication in the paper as a belated obituary honoring the veteran soldier.<sup>2</sup> The letter was published in the Times on December 29, 1855 (page 2, column 5), and was later reproduced in slightly abridged form in Biographies of Leading Texans, Part I.<sup>3</sup> In the absence of early family records and Chaison's personal papers, which he destroyed, the two

<sup>1</sup>Cf. Charlsie E. Berly, "French-American Patriot of the Revolution: Jean Baptiste Chaison (Chiasson)," Part One, The Texas Gulf Historical and Biographical Record, Bicentennial Edition, XI, 1 (November, 1975), 11-29. This is my own recently published biographical study of Chaison. (See page 12.)

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., pp. 23-26 (published memorial letter of 1855 reproduced and examined). This writer attributes the letter to D. H. McFadin's associate, James R. Armstrong.

<sup>3</sup>Both publications repose in the Texas State Library, Archives Division, Austin, Texas, the Georgetown letter being presently in the archives of the Land Commission.

basic sources of biographical data are the Georgetown letter and the family legend. The legend, which was transmitted orally for almost a hundred years after Chaison's death in 1854 and was not committed to written record until 1944, holds that Chaison was born in Paris, France, "about the year 1758" and died "about the year 1852."<sup>4</sup> These dates and the place are at variance with the Georgetown letter, whose writing was made public and was almost contemporary with Chaison, and also at variance with the record of the 1850 United States Manuscript Census Schedules (Population) for Jefferson County, Texas, where Chaison last made his home in the household of his son McGuire. The census record names Halifax, N.S., as his birthplace and his age as 105 years in 1850, which tells us that he was born in 1745.<sup>5</sup> Thus, the Georgetown letter, not the legend, is in agreement with the census record, and its credibility on these points and others has been amply supported by dependable objective evidence.<sup>6</sup>

Jean Baptiste Chaison, who in his early life spelled his name Chiasson, was the son of Joseph Chiasson and Manette Sonnier Chiasson, both of French extraction.<sup>7</sup> Whether the parents emigrated from France or were born in Canada (as was the son) is not known, nor are their birth dates known. In 1763, after their political imprisonment, the parents and son (the latter 18 years old) emigrated to France, where the parents soon died of smallpox.<sup>8</sup> Young Chaison

<sup>4</sup>Berly, op. cit., pp. 16-23 (first written record of legend, 1944, reproduced and examined).

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., pp. 20-21. See household No. 254 of the census, McGuire Chesson [Chaison].

<sup>6</sup>For a developed presentation of the evidence, cf. Berly, op. cit.

<sup>7</sup>Rev. Donald J. Hebert, Southwest Louisiana Records, Civil and Church Records of Settlers, Vol. I, 1756-1810 (Eunice, La., 1974), 126. The entry is in the register of the St. Landry Catholic Church, Opelousas, La.

<sup>8</sup>Berly, op. cit., p. 24 (from the Georgetown letter).

returned to the New World, fought throughout the Revolution, and migrated to southwest Louisiana, where he married Marie LeBlanc, daughter of Jean LeBlanc and Marie Hayes LeBlanc,<sup>9</sup> for all of whom the vital dates are unknown. The first children, twin daughters, of Chaison and Marie were born in 1788. Julienne lived but her twin sister died at age two months. Of his eight children, the other six and their birth years are as follows: Jean Baptiste, Jr. (1792); Joseph (1796); Edmond (1798); Aimee (1801); Gerard (1805); Magliore [McGuire] (1809).<sup>10</sup> Only the dates of death of the youngest, McGuire (1859),<sup>11</sup> and Joseph (about January, 1863)<sup>12</sup> are known.

The Chiasson name appears among French colonists in Nova Scotia, or Acadia, as early as 1671-1686,<sup>13</sup> and this branch of the family settled in the area of Chibouctou (or Halifax, founded in 1749), where Jean Baptiste was born in 1745. Nothing is known of his education or youthful aspirations. For a period during the French and Indian War, the family were held political prisoners by the British for their refusal to take the oath of allegiance. In 1763, when the war ended and France had lost all her settlements in Canada to Britain, the Chiassons emigrated to France, where the parents soon died of smallpox.<sup>14</sup> It is possible that at that time young Chaison joined a fishing fleet that sailed for the fishing banks off Nova Scotia and made return trips to France with cargo.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>9</sup>Hebert, p. 363.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., pp. 126-127.

<sup>11</sup>Mortality Schedules of Beaumont, Jefferson County, Texas, Schedule III, p. 2, no. 14.

<sup>12</sup>Document 454, Estate of Joseph Chiasson, Courthouse, Parish of St. Landry, Opelousas, La.

<sup>13</sup>Bona Arsenault, History of the Acadians (Quebec: Le Conseil de la vie francaise en Amerique, 1966), pp. 11-40.

<sup>14</sup>Berly, op. cit., p. 24.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., p. 17 (included in the family legend).

About 1775, hearing of a probable revolution of the North American Colonies, and fired with a zeal for liberty, as well as revenge toward his old captors and France's enemy, Chaison first appeared at the Siege of Quebec (1775) under Benedict Arnold to assist the patriots in that phase of the struggle for independence from England. He fought under key military leaders, among them General Marquis de Lafayette under whose command he served at the Siege of Yorktown (1781). At the close of the War (1783), he migrated to Louisiana and settled west of the Mississippi River, in the Opelousas area, where he married, brought up a family, acquired lands, farmed and raised cattle, until his removal to Beaumont, Jefferson County, Texas, about 1840. There he spent the remaining fourteen years of his long life, farming and making his home with the family of his son McGuire. He died on July 20, 1854, and was buried in the Jirou Cemetery, now extinct.<sup>16</sup>

Fruitless attempts have been made to obtain the official United States military service record of Jean Baptiste Chiasson (spelling of name at that time), a veteran of the American Revolution. The files for this period are fragmentary, according to the National Archives (GSA), the government buildings having undergone fires in 1800 and 1814, and this soldier's record is missing. The Georgetown letter, however, written by a contemporary of Chaison who knew him well, states that "He took a most active part in our Revolutionary struggle," and designates his participation.<sup>17</sup> He fought under Col. Benedict Arnold at the Siege of Quebec (1775), with Lafayette at Brandywine (1777), under Gen. Sullivan at Germantown (1777), under Greene and Marion at Eutaw Springs where he was wounded (1781), and with General Lafayette at the Siege of Yorktown (1781) —

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., pp. 14-16; 26.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., pp. 24-25.

no doubt under Lafayette's command. Thus, this record indicates that Chaison fought in the Continental, not the French, army and served throughout the War, through Yorktown and perhaps till the disbandment of troops in 1783.

The outstanding achievement of Jean Baptiste Chaison was his participation in the American Revolution, in the cause of freedom and human rights. He had felt the injustice of harsh British political measures in his native Acadia when, as a boy, he was imprisoned along with his parents, and many other French Acadians had suffered a forced dispersion in alien lands. The fact that eight years of his life were given to the American cause, which he embraced also as the French cause and his own, makes him worthy of commemoration. The best public statement and assessment of his merit is the Georgetown letter, which has been explained heretofore as a belated obituary, published in the Texas State Times (Austin), December 29, 1855 (p. 2, c.5), one year after the old soldier's death in 1854.<sup>18</sup>

Why do we desire to commemorate this person? For our reply I shall quote a statement that I made in my recently published biographical study of Chaison:<sup>19</sup>

... his life ... belongs to the early story of the New World — the English, French, and Spanish struggle for colonization and supremacy; the American revolutionary effort in the cause of political independence and human rights; and the westward movement and expansion of America.

... His long life-span rolls out before us ... to chart a modern epic, a story of the New World — that of a man in quest of freedom and a home.

The inscription on the small red granite marker, erected in 1944 by the Colonel George Moffett Chapter, Daughters of the American Revolution, as a memorial honoring Jean Baptiste Chaison, is presented in full in my biographical

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., pp. 23-29 (my reproduction and analysis of the letter, or obituary).

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., pp. 12, 29.

study.<sup>20</sup> The site of Chaison's grave was the Jirou Cemetery, now extinct but once located on the north side of Gladys Street, between Mariposa and Oakland streets, Beaumont, Texas.<sup>21</sup> A century after the old soldier's death and interment, the trees and wooden crosses serving as grave-markers had deteriorated beyond identification, and the graveyard had yielded to the construction of a church and playground. Even the memorial marker, placed in 1944 on the general site of his grave, had to be moved in 1970 to city property in Pipkin Park, for protection. There it now stands, beside the Temple to the Brave,<sup>22</sup> diminutive in size but presently awaiting a complementary means of memorializing our Soldier of the Revolution.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., p. 15 (marker inscription).

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., p. 15.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., p. 14.

The D. A. R. marker, which will stand near the THC marker, if the State marker is granted, has very little data. It reads:

R E V O L U T I O N A R Y  
S O L D I E R  
1775 \_\_\_\_\_ 1783

J O N A S C H A I S O N

Placed by the

Col. George Moffett Chapter  
Daughters of the American  
Revolution

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Livesay, Alberta Chaison Russell, Personal files and conferences (1975).

Mortality Schedules of Beaumont, Jefferson County, Texas. Schedule III, p. 2, no. 14.

United States Manuscript Census Schedules of 1850, Jefferson County, Texas. Population, Household No. 254.

Research and historical narrative by \_\_\_\_\_

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